



Historia Fidei Lux

Gathered Fragments

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Catholic Roots

By Blanche McGuire

The tangled roots of Catholic history often begin at home. You don't need to visit great libraries or track trends and migrations through complex histories or databases. Using ordinary family, civil or church records and stories, you can see how Catholicism influenced the lives of your family through generations.

In my family, Catholic stories ring clearly through the years....for better or for worse. Here's a sampling of the holics I found on my family tree.

There's Michael, a combative man who paid extra taxes to the British crown in colonial Maryland. His tax records clearly mark him as "Papist." He never stopped suing his neighbors. And he never gave up his faith.

Nor did Christian, the aptly named German farmer whose home served as a Mass House when public Catholic worship was forbidden in the colonies. Over the decades, his home was blessed by countless weddings and baptisms.

John and Christina, a young German couple once became godparents for a newborn baby boy. That baby grew up to become Bishop of Buffalo.

And there's Rachel, a pioneer woman who pledged a dollar to support visiting priests and did all she could to foster the Church. Most people leave money to their children. Her collected money from hers to give to the church and the poor.

How about the enterprising McGuires who donated land for a



Catholic cemetery and had it consecrated? Until the first human took up residence, they used the land to pasture cows and confound visiting clergy.

One of my distant grandmothers brought Prince Gallitzin to Western Pennsylvania to care for a dying woman. Other relations named their sons after him. Somehow, the noble names of the Demetrius and Augustine got transformed in the Cambria County mountains. In those parts, most folks called them "Met" or "Gus." And there were other little boys with distinguished names like "Heyden" or "Gibson," named after parish priests, of course!

Michael, one of my German forebears, inherited the family farm if and only if he took his mother to Mass whenever she wanted. If he ever protested or charged her, his legacy was forfeit. Of course, no one knows how often Mama wanted to go.

And on another branch is Kate, a young girl who began working as a live-in maid in a grand house in Pittsburgh. Every Sunday, her Irish mother took the train from a distant location to make sure Kate attended Mass. Or so the story goes.

I never knew my mother's mother, whose name I bear. But I once saw her inscription on a book's flyleaf. She had copied St Teresa's prayer "Let Nothing Disturb Thee." Across the years, her message of faith remains undimmed.

Finally, there's the inspiring story of Charlie, a young altar boy in the 1890's. The priest had just blessed the Easter water and entrusted it to Charlie and a companion. Their mission was to carry the consecrated tub from the rectory to the church. But one of the boys stumbled and the Easter water flowed downhill. Desperate for a miracle, the boys spied a nearby horse trough full of clean sparkling water surely blessed by the Lord for emergencies. Or so we can hope. For the horses' water graced many homes in the year to come.

Lecture on Mercy Hospital's History, April 29

April's featured lecture is "Mercy Hospital: A History of Caring for the Community," by Kathleen Washy, archivist at Mercy. Washy, a longtime board member of the Catholic Historical Society, will draw from the institution's 154 years of service in Pittsburgh. The lecture will take place April 9 at 2:30 p.m. in Synod Hall, 125 North Craig Street in Oakland.

A Brief History of St. Bartholomew Parish

St. Bartholomew Parish was established in June 1950 by the Most Rev. Hugh C. Boyle, D.D., the Bishop of Pittsburgh. Penn Hills, one of the largest municipalities in Allegheny County, was growing rapidly and many new housing developments were springing up throughout the township. A small group of Catholic families who had settled in Penn Hills, petitioned the Bishop to establish a parish in this area.

The Erhardt family donated seven acres of land along Frankstown Road. The first pastor, Father Charles V. Kerr was appointed and began his duties June 28, 1950. The first Mass in the parish — attended by 34 parishioners — was offered in the living room of the Erhardt residence (opposite the present Church) June 29, 1950. The

the day, arrangements were made to rent the Penn Hebron Garden Club as a temporary Church.

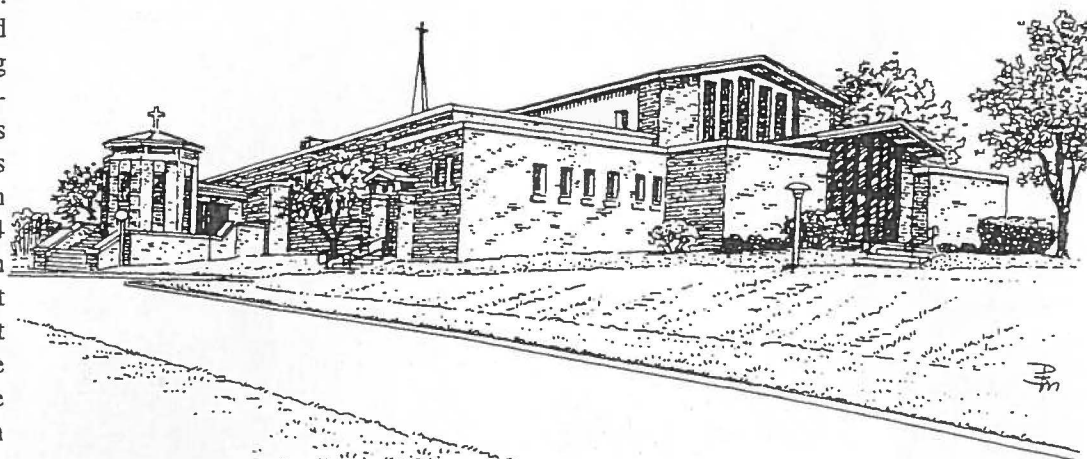
In August 1950 the Ursuline Sisters began catechetical instructions for the children of the parish, and in fall 1950 the Holy Name Society and the Ladies Guild were established. A new house, adjacent to the church property was purchased in December 1950 as a temporary rectory. The young and growing parish was saddened by the untimely death of Father Kerr in February 1951, only eight months after his having been appointed pastor. Before he began the establishment of St. Bartholomew Parish, Father Kerr had been the assistant pastor at Holy Rosary, Homewood. Before the construction of the first parish building here, many of the early baptisms and several weddings were celebrated at Holy Rosary Church.

After the death of Bishop Boyle, the bishop, John Dearden, appointed Father Stephen C. Helzlsouer as the new pastor of St. Bart's Feb. 7, 1951. Father Helzlsouer took up residence Feb. 15, and immediately awarded a contract for the first permanent structure in the new parish. This first building served as a

temporary Church for the new parish, and the first Mass to be offered on the ground floor of the new structure was celebrated October 7, 1951. His Excellency, Bishop Dearden, officiated at the dedication of the new building Oct. 28, 1951.

Attendance at Sunday Mass jumped from 1,200 to 1,500 almost overnight. By the end of 1951, regular attendance

pastors were assigned, served for a number of years and then moved on. The school building was enlarged again, and then a third time. The school now has 28 classrooms, a gymnasium and cafeteria. St. Bart's regularly fielded winning teams in football and basketball. Trophies by the score line the shelves and cases celebrating many winning teams over the decades. By 1963, all



was approaching 1,800 people. In June 1952, Father Robert J. McBride was assigned as the assistant pastor to Father Helzlsouer. During the school year 1952-1953 the Sisters of Charity provided religious instructions for the children of the parish. The debt on the first building was paid off in December 1952, and the bishop gave permission for a new addition that would contain a school. The future gymnasium of the school was prepared to serve as the third temporary church within the parish.

The Sisters of the Divine Redeemer from Elizabeth, Pa. were asked to staff the new school. However, since more than 450 children were registered, the curriculum for the first year of operation was limited to the first three grades. St. Bartholomew parish school was dedicated Sept. 5, 1954. A new convent to house twenty-four sisters was constructed and then dedicated in 1955.

More and more Catholic families moved into the Penn Hills community. A second assistant pastor, Father George T. Leech was appointed by the bishop in 1956. Over the years, other assistant

building program debts had been satisfied, and Msgr. Helzlsouer petitioned the bishop for permission to continue with the final phase of construction. Ground was broken in September 1964 and construction was begun on a permanent church and rectory. Monday, May 24, 1965, the new church was dedicated by His Excellency, Bishop John J. Wright. A Moehler pipe organ was installed. Mr. David Volker had been serving as organist and director of music for a number of years. Under his direction, St. Bart's Men's Choir became well known throughout the diocese. They were often called upon to perform for diocesan liturgical functions, sang at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and recorded a long-playing record of sacred choral music.

In recognition of his service to the Church of Pittsburgh, Father Helzlsouer was made a Monsignor. He is remembered for his remarkable ability to remember the names of individuals and families throughout the parish, his drive to encourage each family in the parish to

participate in the parish festival, and his remarkable talent and proficiency in playing cards. Msgr. Helzlouer died shortly after he retired in June 1983. Bishop Vincent M. Leonard appointed Father Walter Wichmanowski as the next pastor. Father Wichmanowski, had had a long and distinguished service as a military chaplain prior to his coming to St. Bart's. He ministered to the people of St. Bart's from August 12, 1983, to June 10, 1991. When Father Wichmanowski retired Bishop Donald Wuerl appointed Father James Ruggiero pastor. Father Ruggiero served from June 17, 1991, to July 28, 1997, when he was asked to take on the responsibility of serving the whole Diocese of Pittsburgh as the secretary for clergy and religious. Our present pastor, Father James W. Garvey, who was familiar with Penn Hills from his having served for five years in the neighboring parish, St. Charles Lwanga, was appointed pastor by Bishop Donald Wuerl in August 1997.

This text was adapted from the dedication booklet for St. Bartholomew Church Mary 24, 1965. Additional historical information was added by Father James Garvey for the parish's fiftieth anniversary in June 2000.

Those Who Served at St. Bartholomew

Sisters who served as Principal at St. Bartholomew Grade School since its foundation are: Sister Comrada SDR; Sister Cecelia SDR; Sister Leona SDR; Sister Ignatius SDR; Sister Cornelia Marie SDR; Sister Laurentia SDR; and Sister Karen Brink, OSB.

Pastors: Father Charles V. Kerr; Father Stephen C. Helzlouer; Father Walter Wichmanowski; Father James S. Ruggiero; Father James W. Garvey.

Assistant Pastors: Father Robert J. McBride; Father George T. Leech; Father Francis V. Marchukonis; Father William R. Bovard; Father Joseph D. Slater; Father Basil Lynch, TOR; Father Thomas D. O'Neil; Father Robert R. Werthman; Father Jeremiah T. O'Shea; Father Daniel A. Valentine; Father Samuel Esposito; Father Robert R. Coyne; Father Pierre M. Falkenhan; Father Dennis Wargo; Father David DeWitt; Father J. Francis Frazer; Father George W. Zirwas; Father George C. Newmeyer; Father Aaron J. Kriss; Father Thomas J. Galvin; Father Richard J. Mueller; Father Vincent F. Kolo. Father Diego Cadri (resident).

A Simple Question

In the 1840s, a group of boys was playing in the vicinity of Saint Patrick's Church, Pittsburgh, and as, as usual, were making a great deal of noise. The pastor, Father Edward F. Garland, came out of the church. The boys, all but one, scattered. Father Garland asked the young lad why he didn't run with the others. The boy replied that he didn't run because he "was not a Catholic." Father Garland asked, "Why aren't you a Catholic?"

Father Garland's question so embedded itself in the boy's mind that when he was a student at the University of Virginia in 1853, he became a convert to the Catholic Faith.

Later the boy, Thomas A. Becker, became a priest, and then the first bishop of Wilmington, Del., and eventually the bishop of Savannah, Ga.

What a beautiful answer to a very simple question.

— From the files of
Msgr. Francis A. Glenn



John Henry Newman

Pittsburgh's Oxford Movement

In the 1860s, Harmar Denny, grandson of the first mayor of Pittsburgh, and Pollard Morgan, son to Captain Morgan, a commanding officer at the Pittsburgh Arsenal, were students for the Protestant ministry. They went to Oxford, England, for the completion of their studies.

They arrived in the full flowering of the Oxford Movement, the Anglican rediscovery of Catholic tradition,

which had been launched by John Henry Newman and others. Like Newman, the Pittsburghers converted to Roman Catholicism, and they returned to Pittsburgh as Catholic priests.

— From the files of
Msgr. Francis A. Glenn

Stories from the Mercy Hospital Archives

By Kathleen M. Washy

Mercy Hospital has many interesting stories, some of which have been passed down and recorded within the documents found in the Mercy Hospital Archives.

Both the *Mercy Hospital Annals*, Begun in 1908 and Sister M. Cornelius Meerwald's book, *History of the Pittsburgh Mercy Hospital 1843-1959*, provide wonderful, image-filled accounts of Mercy Hospital history, giving readers an interesting glimpse of what life was like in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

One story takes place in the 1870s. Soon after being assigned to work at the hospital, Sister Bernadette had the duty of making nightly rounds, checking to make sure everyone and everything was in its proper place.

"Just before midnight, [Sister Bernadette] made her last round. The lights were all turned low; everyone seemed to be sleeping quietly; as she came along the second floor towards the back stairs, her heart stood still. For there leaning against the banister of the stairs stood what appeared to her to be an intoxicated man, hat pulled down over his face. She said to herself: 'Well, how did he get there?' Realizing she had to act and yet not awaken the patients, she addressed the slouched form in a low voice: 'Good evening to you.' No answer. Thinking he had not heard her, she advanced a step and again repeated: 'I say, Good evening to you.' Still no answer. She decided she would have to show her authority so a third time she said: 'Gentlemen always answer ladies; I said, Good evening to you.' At that moment she heard heavy steps coming down the stairs, a man's step. How had two of them gotten in? She trembled from head to foot as the steps came closer."

But what was this? A doctor! And he picked up his hat and coat from the banister and went out into the night without seeing her. Relieved, she ran upstairs [and dropped] into a chair ... from sheer relief."

Perhaps one of the more delightful stories took place in the 1890s. The tale

is as follows: One day, Sister Clemenza and a companion went out to get some fresh air, taking their meditation books with them. They decided to go up on the Bluff, which today is the Boulevard of the Allies.

"At that date the Bluff was very quiet thoroughfare. Between the sidewalk and the edge of the Bluff ran a long and wide strip of grassy ground. On the space beside the hospital, Sister Magdalen [the hospital's Superintendent] had placed benches for the convalescent patients. Sister Clemenza and her companion did not wish to occupy any of these benches, so they wandered down to a spot just below Stevenson Street. There they found a covered seat. Here they sat down. It was a beautiful morning and the quiet was very pleasing to Sister Clemenza after the active night duty. Suddenly a tremor went through the seat as though some animal was trying to escape from under it; looking down they were dumbfounded to find their feet going up in the air; they were swung around and began to descend; down they went until they landed on Second Avenue by the railroad tracks. They had taken a seat in the old incline that used to operate near the head of Stevenson Street. When the man came to collect their fares, he found two nuns without a penny to their names. They got a free ride back which ended the morning's airing."²

The final story is one of the compassion and loyalty of the Sisters of Mercy. Throughout much of its history, Mercy Hospital was home to several "residents," that is, individuals who had physical limitations but were desirous of a meaningful occupation. The very first "residential" was Julia Kelly, who lived at Mercy for over 70 years, from 1849 until her death in 1923. She had very poor eyesight when she first came to Mercy. She began by working "faithfully in the hospital, giving service whenever needed, but chiefly in the laundry. As time passed on, her work grew more limited in its nature as her eyesight was failing gradually and she could do only such tasks as were familiar to her." As her eyesight and health continued to

diminish, Julia dedicated more of her time to prayer. In an entry in the *Hospital Annals*, one of the authors writes "[Julia's] life of prayer and contemplation is now almost marvelous and is a great source of comfort to the members of this busy household" The Sisters were able to find the silver lining in Julia's infirmities.³

These stories are seamlessly woven into the hospital's colorful and vibrant history, appearing alongside the many medical advances, the quality and compassionate care given to the patients, and the ongoing dedication of the Sisters of Mercy to their Catholic health ministry. By including tales such as these, the histories provide a broad picture of what life at the hospital was like at the time.

1. Meerwald, *History of the Pittsburgh Mercy Hospital 1843-1959*, pp. 144-45

2. Meerwald, *History of the Pittsburgh Mercy Hospital 1843-1959*, p. 195

3. *Mercy Hospital Annals*, Begun in 1908

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